

From: Josh Granek
To: Microsoft ATR
Date: 1/25/02 5:03am
Subject: Microsoft Settlement

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Ms. Hesse:

I would like to register my objection to the Final Judgement proposed to settle the antitrust case against Microsoft. I am just an average citizen, a graduate student who's opinion is influenced by extensive use of a variety of different computers, operating systems, and software packages. I agree with the findings of fact that Microsoft has abused its overwhelming monopoly position. I think that this abuse has led to software that is worse than it would be in a truly competitive market, and prices that are higher than they would be in a truly competitive market. Instead of showing some respect for the government and citizens of this country, throughout the trial, and even after being found guilty of anti-competitive practices, Microsoft has continued to be a bad corporate citizen. This was evidenced to me most recently when I set up a new computer for my mother, it came with Microsoft's latest operating system, Windows XP. In the short period of time I used this computer, it was obvious to me that Microsoft had put considerable effort (effort which in my estimation, would have been better spent improving the operating system itself) in incorporating new software in the operating system that directly competes with software that is already freely available, in an effort to extend its dominance of the software market. I expect that Microsoft's monopoly position will result in the new software incorporated in XP putting other often better software out of business.

Two examples of Microsoft's abuse are striking to me. First, having gained dominance of the web browser market, Microsoft now plans to eliminate support for plug-ins from future versions of Internet Explorer, the clear intention here is to force users to use Microsoft versions of currently available plug-ins (for example, eliminating use of the Real Network's Real Audio Player, and replacing it with the Microsoft Media Player). While it might seem acceptable to eliminate plug-ins when Microsoft provides replacements, it truly becomes a problem in situations where there is no reason to expect that Microsoft would make a replacement. For example, in my field, many people use a browser plug-in called Chime to view the structures of chemical compounds and biological molecules. This is a very useful tool, but it has a limited audience, and Microsoft will never produce a replacement. When future versions of Internet Explorer eliminate support for plug-ins, we will no longer be able to view structures in Internet Explorer. Plug-in support in web browsers furthered the democratization of the World Wide Web, allowing third parties to produce software that would interact with web browsers, now Microsoft plans to put this to an end.

Microsoft's Office software is another example of the company's abuse. Microsoft releases new versions of its office package every few years, and most releases use file formats that are incompatible with other versions. This practice forces businesses and individuals to buy each new version in order to be able to exchange office documents with others. Additionally, in contrast to many other software packages that use file formats which have been published (Adobe is a particularly good example of this- file formats used by their software, such as the Postscript, Portable Document Format, and even the file format for Adobe's Illustrator software are published), so other software can include filters that enable the files to be read, Microsoft Office uses file formats that are proprietary, so other software can't read these files,

further cementing the monopoly.

Microsoft seems to believe that it is in every citizen's best interest (or at least their investors') that they be allowed to do whatever they want, but as George Will recently said, capitalism only succeeds when properly regulated by the government. While I understand that Microsoft's job is to, at all cost, maximize its profits for its investors, it is the government's job to counter this tendency when it begins to hurt consumers and the public in general. I think it is important that Microsoft be prevented from continuing to abuse its domination of the computer software market, and as a result, reducing the diversity in available software, and increasing the price of software.

I am no expert in business or antitrust law, but I think that the proposed settlement will do little to prevent Microsoft's continued abuse of its monopoly. I am not in a position to propose a better settlement, and I wouldn't presume to, many very good alternatives to the current proposal have been made by those much more qualified than me to do so.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Josh Granek